The Official Fall Newsletter of New and Old Excuses and Pleas for Orders

September 15, 1987

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Dear Good and Patient People:

As my old pal Gomer would say, "Thank ye, Thank ye, Thank ye!" for your overwhelming and heartwarming response to my last "Russ has the Middle-Age-Crazies" newsletter! I received hundreds of encouraging and supportive letters about my publishing efforts, many hundreds of sweet people like you who wrote to tell me how much you enjoy my books and that you would always rather have it done right than have it done on time! Yeah, I know what you really want is to have it both ways!... but that seems to be impossible for me to accomplish, so I always choose to do the best job I can do, no matter how late. Volume Three of my ERBLOI (The Edgar Rice Burroughs Library of Illustration) was only seven years late!...but I'm mighty proud of that three-volume set, and a hundred years from now, nobody will remember that I was seven years late in getting it finished! So, really, Thanks again, guys, for all the nice letters and good wishes, which helped to ease me over my 50th birthday in July! Now for the NEWS!:

As I reported in that last newsletter, the color MAD volumes have been delayed mostly because of the fact that I have had to start using a different color separation place, but now those problems seem to be mostly behind me. I am happy to report that Volume 3 of MAD, both color and black and white, is all printed and at the bindery, and that Volume 4 is on the press, and the slipcases are all finished! This means that if all goes well, you should be receiving Volumes 3 and 4 and the slipcase to complete your MAD sets by no later than November first! Remember that the black and white edition of the Complete MAD is limited to only 1000 sets, and most of these are now sold, so that edition will soon be out of print forever, while the color edition (same price) will be kept in print as long as there is a demand, which I hope will be for a long time!

While I am on that subject (limited editions selling out), if you have been waiting to order a print of Frank Frazetta's beautiful watercolor, "Golden Girl", you have waited too long. That edition (2000 signed and numbered prints) is now sold out. If you are waiting to buy the 3-volume slipcased set of ERBLOI (for Tarzan fans and Burroughs collectors), be advised that the limited edition of 2000 numbered copies is very nearly sold out, and will soon be out of print. As a frame of reference, you should note that Another Rainbow's first book, The Fine Art of Walt Disney's Donald Duck by Carl Barks, which was a limited edition of 1875 signed, numbered copies, and which originally sold for $200., has been out of print for over six years and is now selling for $500. So, if you ever intend to buy a set of the Burroughs Library (ERBLOI), DO IT NOW!

More NEWS: Work is progressing on the "New Direction" sets (total of seven volumes), and my tentative date of having those ready to ship is around the first of the year, to be followed by the "Pre-Trend" sets in early-to-mid 1988,

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and I am currently accepting pre-publication orders on both these series at $125. for the complete "New Direction" and $200. for the "Pre-Trend" sets. The retail prices for both these series will be considerably higher when they are published, and you do save approximately 20% (or more) by buying them now.

After the "Pre-Trend" series, there will come the "Picto-Fiction" set, the "3-D" set, and a complete index volume to the Complete EC LIBRARY, which at that point will number 20 slipcased sets! And then my monumental project of preserving Bill Gaines' and Al Feldstein's and Harvey Kurtzman's EC work will be finished. I will continue to release an occasional EC Classic (full-color, 56-page, softcover, $4.95 editions) of selected stories and issues, but all the EC material will never appear in that format. Once again, if you want it all, you want the EC LIBRARY. If you want a taste, you can get the EC Classics.

EC Classic #11 will be another TALES FROM THE CRYPT, and EC Classic #12 will be another WEIRD SCIENCE. I am not taking subscriptions past #12, as the future of that series remains questionable. I am simply not selling enough of them to keep the series going at a bimonthly pace. My biggest problem is that the comic book store owners do not restock the issues as they sell them out. All ten of the EC Classics are still available, yet most comic book shops only keep the lastest issue or two in stock. If they would keep them all in stock, I could sell enough of them to maintain a bimonthly schedule of publication. If you have any influence at your local comic book shop, you might do me a big favor and ask the manager or owner to keep all ten issues of the EC Classics in stock at all times. Also, there are many comic shops that do not carry the EC LIBRARY line, so if you don't see them on display, ask the manager (as my old pal Dayton Allen used to do) "Why not?"

But don't buy them there! Buy them from me. Let me digress. I am just about to lay some numbers on you that will open your eyes about my end of this business, and in the process I realize that I am going to rile some of the comic book shop owners and some of the distributors who handle my EC LIBRARY and EC Classic books. But the numbers are true, and I want you to understand how I got myself into this bind, and why you should order all your EC books directly from me rather than buying them at your comic shop or from another mail-order book-seller! So, at the risk of stepping on toes, here goes:

Here is the problem in a nutshell, and I'll give you the numbers later: When I started publishing the EC LIBRARY, my print runs were (and still are) 5000 of each set. At that time (nearly ten years ago! Gulp!), I could count on selling approximately half of the print run directly, either through mail-order or by taking the books to conventions which I attended, and the other half of the print run to distributors who sold to comic book shops. That formula worked.

But in the last ten years, hundreds of comic book shops have sprung up all over the country, and today I am selling only around 20% of my print runs directly, through this newsletter and through direct mailings to customers like you, with the other 80% being sold through distributors! And that formula is not working, and here is why...here are the numbers:

As an example, take the five-volume slipcased set of TALES FROM THE CRYPT. My cost of printing, color separating the covers, binding, slipcase, mailer, etc. is around $30. per set. I pay a royalty to Bill Gaines, which he splits with the EC artists, of 10% of the retail price ($100), so the royalty on a set of CRYPT is $10, regardless of whether I sell the set retail, pre-pub, through a subscription plan, or wholesale. Therefore, I have a total of $40. invested in each set of

CRYPT. I sell to distributors like Bud Plant, Diamond, and Capital City at 55% discount off retail price, so I sell those sets which cost me $40, for $45. If I figure in overhead, cost of my two employees who keep records, answer the phone, and fill orders, then I am probably losing money on each set of CRYPT that is sold at comic shops!

Now, for comparison, when I sell a set of CRYPT directly, I pay the postage of approximately $5, which ups my cost to $45, but the selling price ranges from $75 to $100, depending upon whether I sell the set as a single set, as a multiple-set sale, or as part of a subscription sale, which means that on any set which I sell to you directly, I am making a profit of between $30 and $55, which is enough for me to cover overhead, etc.

So, you say, why don't I just stop selling through the distributors, handle all the sales directly, and make a better profit on each set of CRYPT? Because I don't have access to all the customers. The distributors and the comic shops have walk-in customers who will not buy anything through the mail, and I simply do not have access to those buyers. What I need to make the formula work again is for everyone who is reading this newsletter, to whom I do have access, to buy their EC LIBRARYs and EC Classics directly from me, and not from their local comic shops, and for all the other buyers who walk into the comic shops and who are not on my mailing list to continue to do their buying through the comic shops.

One alternative for me would be to cut my print runs down to, say, 2500 sets and try to sell them all directly. That is, to simply not wholesale the sets to distributors and comic shops. But by cutting the print run in half, it would increase my cost per set from $30 to around $40, and I am only reaching around half the audience which I now reach. It's a Catch-22 situation.

To further encourage you to buy these books directly from me, I have just installed a toll-free 800 number which you can use to place your order by phone, if you have a MasterCard or Visa. All you have to do now to place an order for anything on my order blank (enclosed) is to call 1-800-EC-CRYPT. That is a toll-free call that I am paying for, so I only will accept orders on this 800 line. Also, my Missouri customers (all five of them) cannot use this toll-free number and will have to use the regular number 417-256-2224 to place orders. So, please use the 800 number 1-800-EC-CRYPT only to make an order! If you call for any other reason...to ask a question, to find out about the Comic Art Auction, etc., etc., DO NOT use the 800 number! If I'm gonna pay for the call, I expect to get an order out of it!

I saw a new item at the San Diego Comic Con that I really liked, the Ollie North Coloring Book, published by Paul Burke and Bob Taylor, with great caricatures by MAD artist Mort Drucker! The book retails for $4., and my price is $5. because my prices always include a sturdy mailer and includes postage or UPS cost. You'll find the Ollie North Coloring Book listed on the enclosed order form.

If you will kindly refer to the enclosed order form, I would like to explain it in some detail. At the top of the form, in fine print, Canadian and overseas customers are reminded that they must include extra funds to cover the higher costs of postage to them. Postage is paid to all US customers.

The box at the top contains the two current pre-publication offers. When you accept a pre-publication offer, you and I agree on a little contract. I agree to sell you the set(s) at a lower price than the published price will be, and you agree to wait patiently and not gripe at me until I finally get the set(s) mailed. I am often...or should I say, always...late, so if you make a pre-pub order, expect me to be late and I won't disappoint you! If you "cain't wait", don't order pre-pub, just wait until a newsletter like this one announces that the books are ready to ship and you will have your order filled immediately but you pay a higher price. By the way, we ship items which are in stock within one or two days of receiving your order.

The next box, the biggest one, lists 13 sets of EC LIBRARY books and ten sets of color covers that are in stock and ready to ship (except in this one case, Vol 3 and Vol 4 MAD). At the bottom of the box you see that if you order 3 sets, you can take 10% off the total, if you order 5 sets, you get a 15% discount, and if you order 8 or more sets, you can take a 20% discount. This makes the orders for 8 or more sets similar to my former subscription plan, which I no longer offer. It is a blatant, out-and-out enticement to you to order all the sets you want at once, so I can sell my books faster and ship more economically, and you can save money.

In the next box you can order an EC T-shirt which has a full-color reproduction of the cover to WEIRD SCIENCE #16 by Wally Wood, in Small, Medium, or Large (XL size is sold out), at $10 for one shirt or $25 for three shirts. Incidentally, I have not announced this before, but because of slow sales of T-shirts, I have decided that all EC T-shirts will be limited editions. I had 1000 of the first shirt made up and have perhaps 400 of them left. When they are all sold, I will not produce any more of that T-shirt, and if I produce any more EC T-shirts in the future, I will make only 1000 of them and then they will go "out of print".

The next box contains the ten EC Classics which are now available and a blank for ordering #11 or #12 when it is printed. At this time I am not taking any subscriptions past #12. Just as with the EC LIBRARY sets, the more issues of EC Classics you buy, the better the price I offer you. You can buy any number from one to all twelve.

In the next box, notice that EC PORTFOLIOs one and two are completely sold out and no longer offered, but #3 through #6 are still available at the original published price of $15. each. These are larger (17"x12") portfolios of selected EC stories, in black and white, designed for "art nuts" who want to see the EC art printed as large as possible. Also in that box you can order the 3-volume ERBLOI, a limited edition of 2000 sets for Burroughs enthusiasts, which is nearly sold out, and you can subscribe to my quarterly Comic Art Auction, in which I sell original artwork from EC comics, MAD comics, and newspaper strips, and occasionally Frazetta and Carl Barks artwork.

The "Frazetta" box contains some comic art books I published in the early 1970s containing Frazetta comic art, and the "Closeout Specials" box contains some items that I am nearly sold out on and do not intend to re-stock.

The last box contains the "New" items: the recent Krazy Kat book, three different editions of The Art of Jack Davis, and the above-mentioned Ollie North Coloring Book. You can order by phone if you have MasterCard or Visa, otherwise please send me the order blank with your check or money order.